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MAŠŠOTH-FESTIVAL

JULIAN MORGENSTERN

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THE ORIGIN OF MAŠŠOTH AND THE MAŠŠOTH-FESTIVAL

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It is a generally accepted fact that the biblical festival of *Pesaḥ*, or Passover, is the result of the amalgamation of two ancient festivals, the original *Pesaḥ* and the *Ḥag Hammaššoṭh*.¹

Pesaḥ was in origin essentially a shepherd festival, observed by the Israelite tribes in common with practically all Semitic peoples in the nomad stage of civilization. Upon it, apparently, the firstlings were offered as a taboo-sacrifice to the deity, conceived of primarily as the creator and bestower of life. However, after these nomad tribes had taken up permanent residence in Canaan, and had passed over into the agricultural stage of civilization, with the necessary modification of original shepherd customs and religious rites, this sacrifice of firstlings upon this annual festival developed into the sacrifice of a yearling lamb or kid for each household, now the regular social unit. This was known as the Paschal lamb or Paschal sacrifice, and became the characteristic feature of the celebration of the original nomad festival in the new agricultural environment. From its beginning *Pesaḥ* seems to have been celebrated at night, and to have been of only one night's duration.

The *Maššoṭh*-festival, on the other hand, was an agricultural festival pure and simple, celebrated originally by the Canaanites and borrowed from them by Israel. It was celebrated just before the beginning of the harvest season, which in Palestine comes shortly after the vernal equinox,² and, along with most of the

¹ Cf. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*⁴, pp. 82-88.

² According to Dionysius of Alexandria (Eusebius, *Church History*, VII, 20), it was not proper to celebrate the Passover until after the vernal equinox. Muḥaddasī (*Description of Syria, Including Palestine*, translated by Le Strange [Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society], p. 76) too relates that Easter was celebrated by both the Christians and the Moslems of Syria at the vernal equinox.

agricultural festivals of the western Semites, was of seven days' duration. The characteristic feature of its celebration, at least in the undoubtedly modified biblical form, was the eating of *Maṣṣoth*, or unleavened bread.

The question of the origin of this peculiar and interesting rite is one which has always been recognized as important, but which has generally been dismissed with a superficial explanation, that, however, lay so ready at hand as to mislead even the most capable and careful scholars.¹ Because of the evident connection of the *Maṣṣoth*-festival with the beginning of the harvest, and the bringing of the 'Omer, or first sheaf, of barley as a taboo-sacrifice, and the permission following thereupon to eat of the new crop, it has been generally assumed that these *Maṣṣoth* were made of the new crop, were "the natural offering, from the newly-gathered barley, to the gods that had allowed the crops to ripen, and after that were the staple article of food of the harvesters,"² and were partaken of during the festival as a kind of sacrament.

It is, to say the least, surprising that this theory should have found such general acceptance. For, since the 'Omer was brought, at the very earliest, only on the second day of the festival, and the new crop was absolutely forbidden until this sacrifice had been brought, and yet the eating of *Maṣṣoth* was enjoined from the very first day of the festival, it follows that either the *Maṣṣoth* of the first day must have been made of the old crop, and have differed in this respect from those eaten after the 'Omer had been brought, a distinction of which no biblical record is found,³ or else the

¹ As for example, Wellhausen, *op. cit.*, pp. 83 f.

² Hirsch, in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, IX, 554.

³ This is touched upon in the older Midrashim, yet too briefly and confusedly for the evidence to be at all conclusive. To harmonize Deut. 16:8, "Six days shalt thou eat unleavened bread," with Exod. 13:6, "Seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread," Rabbi Simon (*Sifre to Deut.*, par. 134; ed. Friedmann, 101b) says, "For six days one should eat (*Maṣṣoth* made) of the new grain, and for one day (*Maṣṣoth* made) of the old grain." (However the Sulzbach edition, 69a, col. 2, reads, "For six days one should eat of the new grain, but on the seventh day of the old." This last procedure, though strange indeed and probably incorrect, agrees in part with *Meḥilla*, Bo, VIII [ed. Weiss, 111b]). Cf., also *Jer. Pesahim*, V, 33a. These references I owe to the kindness of my colleague, Professor J. Z. Lauterbach.

Maṣṣoth of the entire festival must have been made, wholly or in part, of the old crop.

Furthermore, if the *Maṣṣoth* were made of the new crop at the very beginning of the harvest, they could have been made of barley alone. And if so, then this fact would certainly have been properly recorded. Not only does no such provision occur, but the Bible seems by its very silence and the general nature of its references to imply that *Maṣṣoth* might be made from almost any kind of grain. And the Mishnah¹ distinctly provides that *Maṣṣoth* may be made of wheat, barley, spelt, oats, or rye, while according to the Gemara² rice and a species of millet are alone prohibited. Clearly the *Maṣṣoth* could not have been made of the new crop, but must have been made of the old crop, at least in part. Consequently, the customary explanation of their origin, cited above, is altogether groundless.³

Before we offer a solution of this problem we must first determine the exact time, in relation to the harvest, when this festival was originally celebrated. Whereas P (Exod. 12:3, 6, 15-20; Lev. 23:5-8; Num. 28:16-25) dates the festival from the 15th through the 21st of the first month, the older codes (Exod. 23:15; 34:18; Deut. 16:1-8) merely fix the festival for the month⁴ of Abib, the month of ripening grain. After the close of its Passover legislation, Deuteronomy proceeds to legislate for the next harvest festival, of first-fruits or weeks (Deut. 16:9-12). It provides that this festival, of only a single day's duration, shall come exactly seven weeks after the day when the sickle is first put to the standing grain. There is no direct statement that the *Maṣṣoth*-festival was connected with this last act. Yet from the context as much might be inferred.

However, the provision in H (Lev. 23:9-16) that the *Omer* shall be offered upon the day after the Sabbath of the *Maṣṣoth*-festival,

¹ *Pesahim*, II, 5.

² *B. Pesahim*, 35a. Cf. Eisenstein in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, VIII, 393.

³ Cf. also, Marti, *Geschichte der israelitischen Religion*⁵, pp. 124 f.

⁴ Or, possibly, the new-moon day (a communication from Dr. K. Kohler). I believe that this suggestion has also been made by Meinhold.

and that from this day they shall count fifty days until the Feast of Weeks makes it clear that this same connection between the two festivals is implied in Deut. chap. 16, and that the *Maṣṣoth*-festival, according to D as well as H, was celebrated at the very beginning of the harvest season.

But we must still determine the exact meaning of the much-discussed expression used by H, מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת. Rabbinic tradition has interpreted this as the second day of the *Maṣṣoth*- or Passover-festival, the first day being regarded as the Sabbath because of the importance of the Paschal rites observed thereon, or, more correctly, upon the evening before.¹

However, while this did become the accepted rabbinical interpretation of this expression, it is significant that it was by no

¹ It is, however, significant that Num. 33:3 states explicitly that by מִמַּחֲרַת הַפֶּסַח not the 16th but the 15th of the month was meant. The same is undoubtedly the implication of Josh. 5:11 f. (Granting that the words מִמַּחֲרַת הַפֶּסַח and מִמַּחֲרַת, missing in LXX, are a late insertion [cf. Holzinger, Joshua, pp. 12 f.], then this is the implication of the glossator). Not unlikely the words מִמַּחֲרַת הַפֶּסַח in Num. 33:3 are a gloss, and the original text merely cited the fact that the Exodus took place on the 15th of the first month. At any rate careful consideration shows that מִמַּחֲרַת הַפֶּסַח of Num. 33:3 cannot be identical with מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת of Lev. 23:11; for this would imply that the 14th of the first month, the day preceding the eve upon which the festival really began, consequently the day upon which all preparations for the festal celebration were to be made, was the Sabbath, on the face an utter impossibility. At the same time, it seems that the late author or glossator of Josh. 5:11 f. did mistakenly regard מִמַּחֲרַת הַפֶּסַח of Num. 33:3 as identical with מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת of Lev. 23:11, and therefore told that on the day after the Passover (i.e., the day after the Sabbath), in other words, on the day of bringing the Omer, the sacrifice of which removed the taboo upon the new crop, the people actually began to eat of the new crop (LXX, ^{ἕτα}, for the biblical קָלִירִי. Cf. also, Samaritan Chronicle, XVII [ed. Crane, 50]), and therefore the manna ceased upon this selfsame day.

Furthermore, the traditional application of the term שַׁבָּת to the first day of the *Maṣṣoth*-festival, the 15th of the month, must have been unknown to, and therefore later than, the author of Num. 33:3. For a writer of the priestly school would hardly have ventured to imply that Israel began its journey upon the Sabbath.

My attention has very kindly been called by Professor J. M. P. Smith to Benzinger, *Archäologie* 2, pp. 389, 399, and to Jastrow, 'On מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת ("The Day after the Sabbath")' *AJSL*, XXX, 94-110, which I had overlooked in the preparation of this paper. Jastrow, in particular, advances the hypothesis that by שַׁבָּת the full-moon day, the 15th of the month, is meant. Accordingly מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת would refer to the 16th of the month. However, I find myself altogether unconvinced by the arguments advanced, and therefore see no reason to alter, or even modify, my own arguments and conclusions.

means the universal interpretation. The Book of Jubilees (1:1; 6:17-22; 15:1; 44:3 f.), by fixing the Feast of Weeks upon the 15th of Sivan, clearly began to reckon the fifty days from the 22d of Nisan,¹ the day after the close of the *Maššoth*-festival. The Book of Jubilees probably reflects Hasidean practice.² It is noteworthy that the Samaritans,³ Boethusians, and Karaites⁴ likewise observed the same system of reckoning, and accordingly must also have interpreted מַמְחֵרֵת הַשַּׁבָּת as the day after the close of the entire *Maššoth*-festival. Furthermore, the practice of these sects shows that they interpreted the word הַשַּׁבָּת literally as the Saturday of the week of the *Maššoth*-festival. With them the festival always began on Sunday, and consequently always concluded on Saturday.⁵

¹ It is well known that the calendar system of the Book of Jubilees prescribes a year of 364 days, divided into 13 months of 28 days each. Accordingly the 50th day from the 22d of Nisan would fall upon the 15th of Sivan.

² Cf. Kohler, in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, VII, 301 ff.

³ Petermann, *Reisen im Orient*, I, 289.

⁴ Cf. Revel, in *Jewish Quarterly Review* (New Series), III (1913), 350 f.

⁵ This, too, is the interpretation of the expression adopted by a number of modern scholars. Cf. Holzinger, Exodus, p. 42; Bertholet, Leviticus, p. 80; Baentsch, Leviticus, pp. 414 f.; also Hitzig, "Ostern u. Pfingsten," *Schreiben an S. Ideler*; and A. Epstein, *Eldad Haddani*, pp. 157 ff.

Not improbably from the very oldest times the *Maššoth*-festival began on Sunday and closed on Saturday. This would make the cutting of the *Omer* and the beginning of the harvest fall on Sunday also. This is very probable for economic reasons. Exod. 34:21 (even granting with Bertholet [Deuteronomy, p. 80] that all references here to agricultural practices are late insertions) expressly enjoins the observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest and abstention from work, even during the important period of the harvest. Then the crops must be gathered quickly lest they perish for one cause or another. The loss of a single day is vital. Nevertheless the observance of the Sabbath is particularly enjoined for the harvest period. In view of this the religious calendar would not improbably be so constructed or modified as to enable the people to begin harvesting on a Sunday in order to lose as few days as possible during the critical harvest season, because of the need of Sabbath observance. Further corroboration of this hypothesis may be seen in the celebration of Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday in the ancient Christian church. However, the discussion of the peculiar and interesting celebration of these two days, particularly in the Eastern church, would lead too far afield for this paper, and must be deferred for presentation elsewhere.

Further corroboration of this conclusion may be seen in the fact that the Sabbath preceding the Passover is known in the synagogue as the "Great Sabbath," and special services are held upon it (*Shulhan Aruh*, *Orah Hayyim*, 430 and *Jewish Encyclopedia*, XI, 215b). The traditional grounds for the peculiar importance or sanctity of this

The Falashas too begin to count the 'Omer from the 22d of Nisan,¹ i.e., from the day after the close of the *Maṣṣoth*-festival, regardless of whether this be on Sunday or not, and accordingly celebrate the Feast of Weeks on the 12th of Sivan.² The Peshittā too renders מִמְחֵרֵת הַשַּׁבָּת by מִמְחֵרֵת הַשַּׁבָּת. It is clear, therefore, that the rabbinic interpretation of מִמְחֵרֵת הַשַּׁבָּת as the second day of the festival, with the accompanying result that the *Maṣṣoth* would be eaten during the continuation of the festival through the first six days of the harvest season, was by no means universal or necessarily correct.

Careful consideration of the biblical evidence confirms the conclusion that מִמְחֵרֵת הַשַּׁבָּת can mean only the day after the close of the Passover festival. In the first place it must be noted that vss. 4-8, in which the provisions for the celebration of the *Maṣṣoth*-festival occur, are from P and not from H. The prescriptions of H for the celebration of the *Maṣṣoth*-festival, and the relation thereto of the ceremony of bringing the 'Omer, can no longer be definitely determined. Yet so far as can be gathered from the Bible, there is not the slightest reason for believing that הַשַּׁבָּת cannot designate the concluding day of the festival quite as well as the first day. In fact, since the festival lasted for seven days, it would most likely be thought to have but one Sabbath, and that the last day of the seven, since the feeling must have been strong that the Sabbath came but once, and as the last day of, every seven days. This hypothesis is strengthened by the unquestionable fact

particular Sabbath are confused, and probably prove no more than that from the very oldest times the day was regarded as peculiarly holy. And long after the origin of its peculiar sanctity was forgotten, these various traditions sprang up to account therefor. Not impossibly the peculiar sanctity of this day is a reminiscence of the earliest form of the celebration, when the festival actually began on Sunday, and the preceding day was, in a certain sense, likewise important and sacred as the day of preparation for the festival. A reminiscence of this seems to lie in the tradition (cf. *Tosefot to B. Shabbas, 87b*), that at the time of Exodus the 10th day of the 1st month fell upon Saturday; nevertheless, obeying God's command (Exod. 12:3), the Israelites selected the lambs for the first Paschal sacrifice on that Sabbath day.

¹ Cf. A. Epstein, "Essay on the Falashas," in his *Eldad Haddani*, pp. 153 ff.

² The Falashas, of course, employ the regular Jewish calendar.

that H uses the term שבת frequently in the sense of a group of seven, whether days or years.¹

Exod. 13:6, which gives the J prescriptions for the celebration of the *Maššoth*-festival,² without any direct reference to the Passover with its sacrifice of the Paschal lamb, expressly states that *Maššoth* shall be eaten during the seven days of the festival, and only upon the last day does the *ḥag*, the sacred dance, the culminating religious rite of the festival, occur. A more direct and explicit statement, that in the original *Maššoth*-festival the seventh rather than the first day was the most important day, could not be desired.

In view of this unmistakable evidence it is certain that both D and H, as their contexts imply, regarded, with J, the seventh and last day of the festival as the one of chief importance, the one upon which the ceremonial climax was reached. This therefore must be the day designated by H as the Sabbath, upon the day after which the *‘Omer* was to be sacrificed and the actual harvest and the enjoyment of the new crop were to begin.

It is certain that the ritual importance of the last day of the week, emphasized particularly in P, was the result of the combination of the two festivals, *Pesaḥ* and *Maššoth*. The peculiar nature of the Paschal sacrifice with its many attendant details, all culminating in certain very definite and picturesque ceremonies, performed in a single night, would tend to magnify the importance

¹ Lev. 23:16; 25:8; cf. also, Isa. 66:23 and Duhm on this passage. Note also the common Palestinian-Aramaic and Syriac designation for the week, שבת, ~~שבת~~, and also the New Testament *σάββατον* (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2, 7; Luke 18:12; I Cor. 16:2). This in itself would make it probable that the term השבת as used by H means the last day of the festival rather than the first day.

In this connection attention may be called to the interesting fact that whereas, so far as can be determined, in all other sources שבת is invariably masculine, in H it is regularly feminine. (Exod. 31:13-16; Lev. 23:3, 15, 16; 25:6, 8. In Lev. 16:31, ה'יה should probably be emended to ה'יה; cf. Exod. 35:2; Lev. 23:32; 25:4. Likewise in Jer. 17:24, the Massorites changed the *Ketib* בה to בו. Probably they were correct in this, since otherwise in Jer. שבת seems to be invariably masculine.) Not impossibly this feminization of שבת may be due to the influence of the Babylonian *šabattu* (feminine), with which the H writers, probably living in Babylon, were, not improbably, acquainted.

² Though recast somewhat by later Deuteronomic writers.

of this rite over the rather long-drawn-out rites of the *Maṣṣoth*-festival, particularly colorless when divested of their original, non-Yahwistic elements. Accordingly the natural tendency would be to accentuate the importance of the ceremonial on the first night of the combined festival, and to minimize, unconsciously perhaps, the importance of the last day. This tendency would be heightened as the Passover came to be increasingly regarded as commemorating the Exodus from Egypt, fixed by tradition upon the first day of the festival. Nevertheless Lev. 23:7-8 still represents both first and last days as days of solemn assembly and abstention from work; both are equally holy.¹

From all this evidence we may posit with certainty that previous to its amalgamation with the Passover, and the consequent transference of the ritual culmination of the celebration from the seventh to the first day, the *Maṣṣoth*-festival was celebrated for seven days, and reached its ritual climax upon the last day. On this day the *hag*, or ritual dance, was celebrated, and on the next day the people went out to their fields, solemnly cut the first sheaf of barley and brought it with proper ceremonial to their local shrines as the taboo-sacrifice for the new crop. Thereafter they were free

¹ It is impossible to determine just when this amalgamation of these two originally independent festivals took place. In all likelihood it evolved gradually, owing chiefly to the fact that the two festivals were celebrated at about the same time of the year, and that the Passover, originally a shepherd festival, naturally lost its primary significance when celebrated by an agricultural people. This amalgamation would naturally be furthered by the attempt to attach a historical significance to the combined festival by associating it with the Exodus. Undoubtedly this historicization of this combined festival began some time before D, for already the JE account of the festival associates it with the Exodus (Exod. 13:3-16. But notice that this account shows decided evidence of Deuteronomistic reworking; cf. Holzinger and Baentsch to the passage.) But it may be safely inferred that the amalgamation was still by no means complete at the time of the composition of D, for the Passover legislation in Deut. 16:1-8 is by no means a unit, and exhibits unmistakable evidence of later reworking (cf. Steuernagel and Bertholet on the passage). Likewise H (or P, Lev. 23:5 f.) distinguishes carefully between the two festivals. This distinction is still maintained in the Samaritan Passover ritual (Petermann, *Reisen im Orient*, I, 288). It is quite certain that the final amalgamation of the two festivals, and the complete association of this new resultant festival with the Exodus, with its emphasis laid upon the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb and the attendant rites upon the first night of the festival, is the work of the post-Deuteronomistic period, and finds its first complete and harmonious expression in P.

to partake at will of the new barley, without fear of violating the property rights of the deity and incurring his consequent displeasure and wrath.

This sacred dance upon the last day of the *Maššoth*-festival may well remind us of the festival dance described in Exod. 32:5 ff., of the dances of the maidens of Shiloh in the vineyards as a part of the celebration of their annual *ḥag* (Judg. 21:19 ff.) and of the dances of the maidens of Jerusalem in the vineyards on the 15th of Ab and the 10th of Tishri.¹ It is quite significant that, according to Josephus,² these dances were celebrated thrice annually. The implication is that they constituted integral parts of the celebration of the three great, annual harvest festivals, consequently designated by the term *ḥag*. This entire matter I have treated in greater detail elsewhere.³ There I have shown that these dances were celebrated in the earliest Canaanite ritual in honor of the great Canaanite triad or trinity, the father-god Ba'al, the mother-goddess Ashera, or Astarte, and the divine child, Tammuz, or Adonis. The more important festivals were celebrated for seven days. They began with a period of fasting, mourning, and bodily affliction, as if for someone dead, naturally the dead god of vegetation, Tammuz. But day by day they became more and more joyous in the thought that the dead deity had been, or soon would be, restored to life in the crop of the new year. And this increasing joyousness culminated in the sacred dances upon the seventh day, participated in chiefly by the maidens, and attended by scenes of mad merry-making and wild, unbridled license, and sacred prostitution. Into a detailed consideration of these ceremonies we cannot enter here.⁴

¹ Mishnah, *Taanith*, IV, 8.

² *Ant.* V. ii. 12.

³ *JAOS*, XXXVI (1916), 321-33, and an article soon to appear in *JQR* (New Series).

⁴ It is interesting to note that Maundrell (ed. Wright, in Bohn's *Antiquarian Library* [1848], pp. 462-74), in describing the celebration of Easter at Jerusalem, as witnessed by him April 3-10, 1697, says that the entire celebration lasted seven days. It began with Easter Sunday, or rather with the ceremony of the descent of the Holy Fire in the Church of the Sepulcher on the late afternoon of the preceding day, and continued until the following Saturday. Of this last day Maundrell writes: "We

Now, if the *Maṣṣoth*-festival was originally an Astarte-Tammuz festival, as has been stated, and of this the proof is ample, it would be surprising did it too not begin, as did all other such festivals, with a period of fasting and mourning for the dead and soon-to-be-revived god. Of actual mourning rites only meager traces remain. But there is abundant evidence of the ceremony of fasting as preparatory, or introductory, to the celebration of the *Maṣṣoth*-festival. It is still customary among orthodox Jews for first-born sons, and some say even first-born daughters, to fast in preparation for the festival;² and in more ancient times it seems to have been the regular practice that all people fast on the day before the beginning of the festival, in order that they might better enjoy the

went to take our leaves of the holy sepulcher, this being the last time it was to be opened this festival.

"Upon this finishing day, and the night following, the Turks allow free admittance for all people, without demanding any fee for entrance as at other times, calling it a day of charity. By this promiscuous licence they let in, not only the poor, but, as I was told, the lewd and vicious also, who come thither to get convenient opportunity for prostitution, profaning the holy places in such manner (as it is said) that they were not worse defiled even when the heathens here celebrated their aphrodisia." We cannot help correlating the promiscuous license upon this concluding day with the merry-making and license of the last day of the ancient Canaanite agricultural festivals, and particularly the *Maṣṣoth*-festival, out of which, as is generally admitted, Easter developed.

In this connection too it should be noted that rabbinical tradition has dated the crossing of the Red Sea upon the 7th and last day of the Passover, and in this way accounted for the, to the rabbis, otherwise seemingly inexplicable sanctity of this day. This tradition implies that the song and dances of Miriam and her maidens (Exod. chap. 15) were celebrated on this concluding day of the festival. It is probably a reminiscence of the old Canaanite and early Israelite practice of the dances and songs of the maidens upon the concluding day of the great harvest festivals. Possibly too, the language of the Midrash may even be interpreted as somewhat reminiscent of the fact that this last day of the festival was the Sabbath (*Shemot Rabba*, Par. XIX, near end). Commenting upon Exod. 13:7, the Midrash says, "No leaven shall be seen with thee for seven days; corresponding to the original seven days intervening between the redemption and the dividing of the Red Sea are the seven days of creation; and just as the Sabbath is fixed once in every seven days, so are these seven days (of the Passover) fixed for each year."

² *Shulhan 'Aruḥ*, *ṾOrah Hayyim*, 470. The importance of this practice of the first-born fasting may be inferred from the custom cited by Moses Isserles (*ibid.*, notes), that while the first-born child is still a minor, and therefore not obligated to fast, the father shall fast for him; but if the father himself be a first-born, and therefore bound to fast for himself, the mother shall fast for the child.

opening feast and thereby perform the duty of eating the *Maššoth* with greater gusto and zeal.¹ The Falashas too observe a general fast on the part of all the people from the evening of the 13th to the evening of the 14th of Nisan.²

The traditional reason for this fasting is that it commemorates the deliverance of the Israelite first-born from the fate that overtook the Egyptian first-born. But the Falasha practice and also the former practice of pious Jews, that not only first-born, but all people, fast on the day preceding the Passover, implies that at one time this practice of a general fast may well have been the rule and not the exception. Just this is what we would expect as part of the celebration of an ancient Astarte-Tammuz festival.

Furthermore, the custom, still observed by orthodox Jews, of carefully searching out and destroying all leaven, or so providing for its disposal that there might be no possibility of its enjoyment during the festival, is of prime importance.³ According to R. Jehudah this leaven could be destroyed only by burning.⁴ Its destruction was imperative. The Bible insists that there shall be absolutely no leaven, neither *ḥameš* nor *S'or* within the entire country during the seven days of the festival (Exod. 12:15; 13:7; Deut. 16:4).

We can interpret this custom, and that of fasting as preparatory to the main celebration of the festival, only in the light of similar customs, observed under practically parallel conditions, by primitive agricultural peoples. The entire *Maššoth*-festival, we have shown, originally preceded the commencement of the harvest. The new crop could not be eaten until after its regular taboo-sacrifice of the *‘Omer*, or first sheaf, had been properly offered on the day after the close of the *Maššoth*-festival. The eating of the new crop is among many primitive agricultural peoples a ceremony of deep religious significance, for which careful preparation must

¹ Cf. the discussion of the reason for R. Shesheth fasting on this day (*B. Pesahim*, 108a; also, *Jer. Pesahim*, X, 37b, and the statement of *Masseket Soferim*, XXI, 3, "The pious fast for the sake of the *Maššoth*"). These references also, I owe to the kindness of Professor Lauterbach.

² Epstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 153.

³ *Shulḥan ‘Aruḥ*, *‘Orah Ḥayyim*, 431-39.

⁴ *Mishnah, Pesahim*, II, 1.

be made, since the entire life of the people is bound up with the new crop. Before the first mouthful of the new crop may be taken, the old crop must be entirely destroyed, put out of the way completely. Under no condition may it be mixed with the new crop, even in the bodies of the eaters. They must fast for a definite period, and very often use strong purgatives and emetics in order that absolutely not one grain of the old crop may remain in their bodies at the time when the new crop is first eaten. Otherwise the two crops would be commingled, and the new crop, the food supply for the coming year, would be contaminated and rendered unfit for use.

The annual green-corn festival, observed by the Creek Indians, and in almost identical form by the neighboring and kindred Yuchi, Seminole, and Natchez Indians, is typical. Frazer describes this festival as follows:²

Amongst the Creek Indians of North America, the *busk*, or festival of first-fruits, was the chief ceremony of the year. It was held in July or August, when the corn was ripe, and marked the end of the old year and the beginning of the new one. Before it took place, none of the Indians would eat or even handle any part of the new harvest. Sometimes each town had its own busk; sometimes several towns united to hold one in common. Before celebrating the busk, the people provided themselves with new clothes and new household utensils and furniture; they collected their old clothes and rubbish, together with all the remaining grain and other old provisions, cast them together in one common heap, and consumed them with fire. As a preparation for the ceremony, all the fires in the village were extinguished, and the ashes swept clean away. In particular, the hearth or altar of the temple was dug up and the ashes carried out. Then the chief priest put some roots of the button-snake plant, with some green tobacco leaves and a little of the new fruits, at the bottom of the fireplace, which he afterwards commanded to be covered up with white clay, and wetted over with clean water. A thick arbour of green branches of young trees was then made over the altar. Meanwhile the women at home were cleaning out their houses, renewing the old hearths, and scouring all the cooking vessels that they might be ready to receive the new fire and the new fruits. The public or sacred square was carefully swept of even the smallest crumbs of previous feasts, "for fear of polluting the first-fruit offerings." Also every vessel that had contained, or had been used about, any food during the expiring year was removed from the temple before sunset. Then all the men who were not known to have violated the law of the first-fruit offering and that

² Frazer, *The Golden Bough*³, "Spirits of the Corn and the Wild," II, 72-75.

of marriage during the year were summoned by a crier to enter the holy square and observe a solemn fast. But the women (except six old ones), the children, and all who had not attained the rank of warriors were forbidden to enter the square. Sentinels were also posted at the corners of the square to keep out all persons deemed impure, and all animals. A strict fast was then observed for two nights and a day, the devotees drinking a bitter decoction of button-snake root "in order to vomit and purge their sinful bodies." That the people outside the square might also be purified, one of the old men laid down a quantity of green tobacco at a corner of the square; this was carried off by an old woman and distributed to the people without, who chewed and swallowed it "in order to afflict their souls." During this general fast, the women, the children, and men of weak constitution were allowed to eat after midday, but not before that time. On the morning when the fast ended, the women brought a quantity of the old year's food to the outside of the sacred square. These provisions were then fetched in and set before the famished multitude, but all traces of them had to be removed before noon. When the sun was declining from the meridian, all the people were commanded by the voice of a crier to stay within doors, to do no bad act, and to be sure to extinguish and throw away every spark of the old fire. Universal silence now reigned. Then the high priest made the new fire by the friction of two pieces of wood, and placed it on the altar under the green arbour. This new fire was believed to atone for all past crimes except murder. Next a basket of new fruits was brought; the high priest took out a little of each sort of fruit, rubbed it with bear's oil, and offered it, together with some flesh, "to the bountiful holy spirit of fire, as a first-fruit offering, and an annual oblation for sin." He also consecrated the sacred emetics (the button-snake root and the cassina, or black-drink) by pouring a little of them into the fire. The persons who had remained outside now approached, without entering, the sacred square; and the chief priest thereupon made a speech, exhorting the people to observe their old rites and customs, announcing that the new divine fire had purged away the sins of the past year, and earnestly warning the women that, if any of them had not extinguished the old fire, or had contracted any impurity, they must forthwith depart, "lest the divine fire should spoil both them and the people." Some of the new fire was then set down outside the holy square; the women carried it home joyfully, and laid it on their unpolluted hearths. When several towns had united to celebrate the festival, the new fire might thus be carried for several miles. The new fruits were then dressed on the new fires and eaten with bear's oil, which was deemed indispensable. At one point of the festival the men rubbed the new corn between their hands, then on their faces and breasts. During the festival which followed, the warriors, dressed in their wild martial array, their heads covered with white down, and carrying white feathers in their hands, danced around the sacred arbour, under which burned the new fire. The ceremonies lasted eight days, during which the strictest continence was practiced. Towards the conclusion of the festival

the warriors fought a mock battle; then the men and women, together, in three circles, danced round the sacred fire. Lastly, all the people smeared themselves with white clay and bathed in running water. They came out of the water believing that no evil could now befall them for what they had done amiss in the past. So they departed in joy and peace.

Similar festivals, with parallel ceremonies, all practiced for the same purpose of preventing the mixing of various kinds of food, are celebrated among the most widely scattered peoples.¹

Among practically all primitive agricultural peoples just enough grain is cultivated for food for one year. Occasionally a small amount of the old crop may remain when the new crop is ready to be harvested, but this is the exception and not the rule among peoples that live altogether upon the agricultural plane of civilization and do not carry on commerce with the produce of their fields. Famine, due to a crop for one reason or another insufficient for the needs of the year, is not uncommon among such strictly agricultural peoples. These must have been the normal conditions in ancient Israel and among the still earlier Canaanites. Certainly Lev. 25:20-22² and 26:10 imply that it was an unusual thing for the annual crop to prove sufficient for more than one year.

It is therefore very probable that among the ancient Canaanites and the early agricultural Israelites, the custom existed of destroying the usually meager remains of the old crop before the new crop could be used or even harvested. And if this hypothesis be correct, we must see in the ceremonies of the destruction of all leaven, of the fasting before the *Maṣṣoth*-festival, and of the eating of the *Maṣṣoth* themselves, the religious, sacramental rites by which the last remains of the old crop were destroyed as the necessary preparation for the cutting and eating of the new crop. All of the old crop was thus burned except just enough to prepare the *Maṣṣoth* for the festival. These were actually the very last of the old crop, and with their final consumption the old crop would be entirely destroyed and the new crop could be harvested and eaten with impunity, after the offering of its regular taboo-sacrifice, the first

¹ Frazer, *op. cit.*, 83 ff.

² This is clearly a late insertion into the text and refers rather to the Sabbatical than to the Jubilee year; cf. Bertholet and Baentsch on the passage.

sheaf. These facts, that the entire *Maṣṣoth*-festival, as we have shown, must have preceded the beginning of the harvest, and that the *Maṣṣoth* must have been made entirely of the old crop, admit no other logical and consistent explanation.¹

That this is no forced nor improbable hypothesis is proved by the fact that two rites of strikingly similar nature are still observed in connection with, or as preparatory to, the celebration of Easter in the present-day Christian church of Palestine. Bliss tells that "on this same Thursday (Maundy Thursday) the Maronite patriarch at his seat, with two or three bishops, consecrates the oil of baptism, oil for extreme unction, and the holy chrism (the *meirûn*), all three kinds of oil to be distributed by the bishops among the Maronite churches for use during the coming year. Oil remaining from the year before is burned."² And it is a well-known and oft-described practice that preparatory to the descent of the sacred fire in the Church of the Sepulcher at Jerusalem on the Saturday afternoon preceding Easter Sunday, all fires are extinguished in the Christian homes, monasteries, and churches of Palestine. Runners bearing the sacred brands or tapers kindled from the new holy fire hasten from the Church of the Sepulcher, carrying the precious burden to all parts of the country, and with these the new fires are once more kindled.³ This rite too reminds us strongly of the ritual of the Creek green-corn festival.

But this is by no means all. For agricultural festivals, even among the most primitive peoples, are seldom, if ever, celebrated

¹ Further proof of this may perhaps be seen in the practice recorded in the *Shulḥan 'Aruḥ* (*ʿOrah Ḥayyim*, 435), based upon a decision of Rab (*B. Pesahim*, 6b), that if a man neglected to search for and burn the leaven in his house either before or during the Passover, he must still do so after the festival had passed, for the enjoyment of such food was absolutely forbidden. The celebration of the Passover had made all such food strictly taboo. This too may be a survival of the oldest practice that all grain remaining from the old crop had to be burned, and therefore became completely invalidated, at the beginning of the *Maṣṣoth*-festival and preparatory to eating the new crop.

² *The Religions of Modern Syria and Palestine*, p. 162.

³ Cf. Wilson, *Peasant Life in the Holy Land*, pp. 45 f.; Stanley, *Sinai and Palestine*, pp. 460-64; Maundrell (ed. Wright), *A Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem*, pp. 462-64; Ridgaway, *The Lord's Land*, p. 262; Field, *Among the Holy Hills*, p. 50; and other writers.

merely as important and memorable occasions in the life of the people. They have always a religious significance, are always celebrated in some relation to the supernatural powers that preside over the blessings of agriculture. As stated above, these primitive Canaanite agricultural festivals were celebrated in honor of the great triad or trinity, the father-, mother-, and son-gods, Ba'al, Astarte, and Tammuz. These gods were the result of the deification of the great agricultural forces and phenomena, the heaven or the sun, with its fructifying rain or sunlight, the earth, conceived as the great mother, and the annual crop, the offspring of the union and fertilization of mother-earth by father-heaven. And in the annual cycle of sowing, sprouting, growth, ripening, and harvesting of the grain we have the key to the right understanding of the nature of Tammuz, his myths, and religious rites. His festivals were naturally celebrated at different times of the year, either at the time of his death and burial in the earth, or at the time of his resurrection or rebirth, and were always associated with rites commemorative of the rôle played by the parent deities in the great, annual, divine mystery. In fact, there seem to have been no Tammuz festivals pure and simple. They were rather all festivals in honor of the inseparable trinity of gods, and their rites were not only designed to commemorate the various activities of each of the three gods, but were also of a homeopathic magical nature, intended to compel the great deities to function in the proper manner, and so bring forth the annual and indispensable crop.

But if Tammuz was the annual crop, and this is absolutely certain, then each successive annual crop meant the rebirth of Tammuz, or in another aspect certainly clearly perceived by the people, a new, and each year an ever-new, Tammuz, as the successor of the old Tammuz, the first-born and only-begotten son of mother-earth herself, therefore, the eternally virgin goddess, whose virginity is renewed annually after the birth of her son. And since Tammuz was the crop, and therefore identical with the grain and everything made therefrom, the burning of the remains of the old crop and the eating of the *Maššoth*, as a religious rite, as a sacrament, clearly were nothing but the expression and prac-

tical realization of the principle that the old Tammuz must be completely put out of the way before the new Tammuz, the new crop, can be actually born or reborn. And the eating of the *Maššoth* as a sacrament would be nothing more than the eating of the old Tammuz. That this conception of the eating of the god is neither strange nor forced may be inferred from the story of the celebration of the Passover in the three Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 26:26 f.; Mark 14:22 f.; Luke 22:19 f.), where Jesus gives to his disciples the *Maššoth* with the words, "This is my body," and in the resultant ceremony of the eucharist in the Catholic church.¹ Similar practices of the sacramental eating of the god, parallel to this of the eating of Tammuz in the form of the *Maššoth*, are found among the most widely scattered, primitive, agricultural peoples.²

It is noteworthy in this connection that among the heathen Harranians at the annual festival of the weeping women, celebrated in the month of Tammuz, when the women bewailed the death of Ta-uz, because, as they believed, Ta-uz had been cruelly killed by his master, his bones ground in a mill and then scattered to the four winds, they would eat nothing that had been ground in a mill.³ Likewise among the people of Asia Minor, during the annual festival of mourning for the dead Attis, a deity parallel in

¹ It is significant that the eucharist is partaken of only after fasting. In this connection I may state that Dr. Paul Carus, of Chicago, has suggested to me that the term "mass" for the important rite of the Catholic church that primarily commemorates and is modeled after the Last Supper, may, in view of the significant rôle of the *maššoth* in the traditional accounts of the Last Supper, be derived from the Hebrew *maššah*. According to Fortescue (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, IX, 791) this ceremony was originally designated as *εὐχαριστία*. The term "mass" (*missa*) is not authenticated until St. Ambrose (d. 397). He, however, uses it in such manner as to indicate that it was then an established and commonly accepted term. A doubtful reference occurs in a letter of Pope Pius I (ca. 142-ca. 157). The late mediaeval form *missio* designates the mass as the ceremony of dismissal of the people. But this explanation of the origin of the term is generally regarded as doubtful and unsatisfactory. In view of all this the suggestion of Dr. Carus seems to me quite probable.

² Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, "Spirits of the Corn and the Wild," II, 48-108.

³ Chwolson, *Die Ssabier*, quoting Fihrist, IX, No. 5, p. 4. *Ta-uz* is of course merely a dialectic variation of Tammuz, and approximates very closely the original Babylonian or Sumerian *Du-u-zi*.

every way to Tammuz, the worshipers abstained from bread.¹ Similarly too, as Jaussen records, among the fellahin of Moab still today, before the beginning of the harvest every owner of a field makes a repast for Halil, clearly a Tammuz-survival, at which all the reapers are present. Then he says, "The sickle is opened."² Thereafter the harvest begins. This is undoubtedly a survival of the old custom of sacramental meals preparatory to the commencement of the harvest.

The fasting preparatory, or introductory, to the *Maṣṣoth*-festival would accordingly not only be a ceremony of mourning for the dead Tammuz, but also be designed to prevent the commingling of profane and holy food in the body of the eater, and the consequent contact of the new with the old Tammuz. Robertson-Smith shows conclusively³ that fasting is very often the ritual preparation for a sacramental meal, and evidences his claim by a mass of proof. Just this, as we have seen, was the purpose of the fasting incidental to, and preparatory for, the Creek green-corn festival.

And the *Maṣṣoth* themselves would be the survival of the simplest, most primitive, and speediest form of preparing grain for food, the form in which the nomad, particularly when on a journey, still eats his bread.⁴ This primitive mode of preparing the remains of the old crop for sacramental eating during the seven days of the festival would be peculiarly suited to the nature and exigencies of the occasion. It was merely another instance of the continuation of ancient and outgrown practices in religious cere-

¹ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, "Adonis, Attis and Osiris", 226, quoting Arnobius *Adversus nationes* v. 16; Sallustius Philosophus *De diis et mundo* iv; *Fragmenta Philosophorum Graecorum*, ed. F. G. A. Mühlbach, III, 33.

² *Les coutumes des Arabes au pays de Moub*, p. 252. Cf. Deut. 16:9, ~~בבוא~~ מזהחל הרמש, and the corresponding designation of the 15th of Ab, ~~החמשה~~ יום חבר, (B. *Ta'anith*, 31a), the day that marked the close of the harvest season.

³ *Religion of the Semites*, p. 434.

⁴ Cf. Chwohlsohn, *op. cit.*, II, 218 (note 238) and the designation there of *Maṣṣoth* as "bread after the manner of shepherds." Note also the statement of Musil (*Arabia Petraea*, IV, 148), that camel beduins regard bread as a dainty and eat it only about once a month. Some tribes eat leavened bread only during the rainy season and unleavened bread (*faṣīr*) during the dry season.

monial, long after more modern and practical customs had superseded them in everyday life.¹

Such, we believe, was the origin of the *Maṣṣoth* and of the *Maṣṣoth*-festival.

¹ Cf. Chwolsohn, *op. cit.*, II, 734 (note 126); Toy, *Introduction to the History of Religions*, p. 113, note 1. Similar to this would be the persistent use of flint and stone knives at circumcision (Exod. 4:25; Josh. 5:2), the prohibition of using stones hewn with iron tools in building an altar (Exod. 20:25), the peculiar garb worn during the Passover (Exod. 12:11), and the *ihram*, or sacred garment, worn during the sojourn within the *haram* during the Meccan pilgrimage. These last are undoubtedly survivals of the most ancient and simple Semitic dress. Cf. Burton, *Pilgrimage to al-Madinah and Meccah*, (Memorial ed.) II, 138 f., 205, 284.

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